

Introduction

Sherry Simon

This special issue explores eight spaces of translation—geographical sites, urban spaces, and architectural structures—whose cultural meanings are shaped through language interactions and transfer. Each study confirms the idea that places are created through itineraries and narratives, wanderings and stories, which evolve over time. Situated in the complex cityscapes of Itaewon, Lagos, Lviv, Montreal, Tallinn, Renaissance Florence, Marseille, and the historically rich interzone of Gibraltar, these places illustrate the formative powers of translation in defining sensory experience and memory.

The idea of space and place receives diverse interpretations in these essays—contributing to a field of inquiry which is rapidly evolving. Space is not understood as a simple container where translation takes place, but rather as a site where production and interpretation are intermingled, where translations occur and where identity is reinterpreted. Spaces are indicators of regimes of translation, of the forces that converge to allow or impede the transfer of languages and memories. From the architectural structure of a sanitary station to the dialogue between Gibraltar and Tangier, from the pages of novels to bronze statues, from multilingual markets to the studies where scholars are bent over treatises on Kabbalistic thought—these diverse spaces explode the notion of the “where” of translation.

In her reading of the Sanitary Station of Marseille, Simona Bonelli uses the lens of translation and memory to evoke a place of multiple pasts—linked to the history of Marseille in its function as a place of migration and passage. Originally designed as a medical checkpoint, a place for screening migrants, then long abandoned, it has now become a museum which nevertheless maintains traces of its previous functions. Citing Barthes, Bonelli shows that architectural spaces can be read as chapters of a complex text, continually retranslated. Following the Station in its transformations over the years, she defines it as a palimpsest representing “a place of exile, of displacement, a metaphorical place that contains a plurality of meanings, errant trajectories,

and that lends itself to multiple interpretations.” Initially born as a “boundary area” because of its function of containment and delimitation, the Sanitary Station has eventually “swollen,” through a series of metamorphoses, into a threshold—a place caught up in a tension of the present. This passage from boundary to threshold is enabled by a history of translation.

Hunam Yun’s textured analysis of the district of Itaewon, in Seoul, South Korea, emphasizes the rich history of twists and turns that has marked this zone. This is a history which is not, however, apparent in the capsule “translations” found in tourist guides. As an area which has seen a strong military presence across the centuries, most recently for stationing the Japanese army during the colonial period and subsequently the American army, as a place now attracting many migrants, and also as a place strongly associated with sexuality and sex workers, Itaewon has been the site of cultural amalgamation and conflict. As Yun shows, the various translations of the name of Itaewon itself—foreigners’ village, village for being pregnant with a foreigner’s child, village for pear trees—show that the city as a “a culture-generator” (Lotman) cannot be translated into one fixed image. Itaewon has been a place for travelers and trading, a space of trauma caused by the conflictual history of Korea, a foreigners’ village, a foreign land within the country, a colonized space, a space of freedom and resistance, a window onto Western culture, a space for cultural translation . . . Yun contrasts the selective translations and commodifications of the city with the richness of its reality and history. As a culture-generator, a city deserves a more adequate translation.

Elena Murphy draws a portrait of the multilingual city of Lagos through readings of Nigerian authors who portray the different sounds and accents of one of Nigeria’s most diverse and vibrant cities. The multilingual texts of Sefi Atta, a leading voice in what has come to be known as “The Third Generation of Nigerian Writers,” replicate the language negotiations of the city. Languages such as Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, as well as Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin, flow through Atta’s novels, just as they flow through the city. Particularly interesting is the diversity of cultural forms and spaces which express this plurality—types of music such as afrobeat or highlife music, dance, film, as well as the spaces of Lagos’s streets and markets. Translation is present in varied forms, aiding in the creation of new hybrid linguistic forms and new semantic associations, typical features of interaction in urban areas.

The Straits of Gibraltar, with its twin cities of Gibraltar and Tangier, stand as emblematic spaces of translation—but also as spaces whose hybridities force a rethinking of translation itself. To negotiate across hybrid spaces is to concentrate on the border experience as generating a powerful political vision, working against binaries, against inside and outside. In such zones, translation is a foundational activity, an activity of cultural creation. África Vidal and Juan Jesús Zaro provide a portrait of the Strait of Gibraltar as a natural border between two continents (Africa and Europe), between two countries (Morocco and Spain), and between two cities (Gibraltar, an overseas territory of the United Kingdom, and Ceuta, a Spanish city with its own statute of autonomous government), and offer nuanced descriptions of the cultural histories of those spaces as they have been in interaction with one another. Governed as one territory by the Romans and also during the eight centuries of Muslim occupation of the Iberian Peninsula, the Straits then become an indication of division across empires. The waters of the Strait carry “a layered text of narratives of belonging and exclusion.”

Anastasiya Lyubas reads the Western Ukrainian city of Lviv as a space comprised of buildings, communities, maps, memories, and languages spoken, written, and read—a *tactile*, *textile*, and *textual* fabric. The “real” city, she argues, cannot be experienced without linguistic mediation. Inviting the reader to stroll the city, stopping at monuments and buildings, consulting a map drawn by authors Igor Klekh, Yuri Andrukhovych, and Natalka Sniadanko, she gives the widest meaning to translation as a key to the multifaceted elements which define city life. The city, thus, becomes a construct of individual and collective readings. The essay includes references to the events of 2013–2014 in Ukraine that have problematized even further unresolved issues of identity, politics of memory, and belonging. With an eye attentive to shifts in the role of language in the city, Lyubas shows how the *aural dimensions* of the spoken languages of yesterday have become *visual* places, traces. Yesterday’s commerce has become trade in cultural meanings and in competing claims to the city. The city’s architecture, its history, literary scene, and projections of the future are read as a “text” offering insights into urban experience and the ways it is mediated and interpreted.

Ceri Morgan’s reading of Montreal focuses on two novels from the 1960s which challenge orthodox versions of the language situation in the city. In Yvette Naubert’s *La Dormeuse éveillée* (1965) and Claire Mondat’s *Poupée* (1963), active and passive linguistic translations become signposts for a particular kind of modernity, dramatizing embodied everyday translation prac-

tices occurring in places of work, leisure, and consumption, like the café and department store. The texts are striking for their choice of settings and their sometimes seemingly relaxed mediation of French and English interactions at a time when many examples of *le roman montréalais* are highlighting clashes between these. They prefigure, in fact, many of the everyday interactions between French and English in contemporary Montreal. As such, they offer important pointers as to the possibilities of negotiating differences. Gender is highlighted in the analysis, the body of the protagonist navigating between past and present gender conventions and mappings of Montreal's majority languages, as well as across the very different histories of the protagonists (the French-Canadian maid, the family of Holocaust survivors). Translation becomes a way of being in the world, of overcoming trauma. In many respects, Naubert's and Mondat's protagonists can be seen as "linguagers"—that is, "people [. . .] who engage with the world-in-action, who move in the world in a way that allows the risk of stepping out of one's habitual ways of speaking and attempt to develop different, more relational ways of interacting with the people and phenomena that one encounters in everyday life" (Phipps 2011, 365). Translation facilitates a mobility associated with feminine assertion; translation allows escapes from, or challenges to, the social constraints of the past. Naubert's and Mondat's heroines inhabit a kind of messy middle in their employing of the "tactics" as "always [. . .] partial, provisional and broken" (Phipps 2011, 375). Moving inside and outside the city, they embody a translation practice beyond representation and vital to a "relational" being in the world.

Federico Bellentani considers the case of the relocation of the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn as a practice of cultural reinvention. Here translation takes on its medieval spatial meaning as the physical transfer of a sacred body. This paper proposed an analysis of the marginalization, the removal, and the relocation of the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn. Employing the vocabulary of semiotics, looking at *monument as text*, Bellentani argues that the removal cannot be interpreted through the clashing interpretations of Ethnic-Estonians and Russian speakers. Rather, the Bronze Soldier embodied an array of multifaceted interpretations and the process of its relocation elicited different emotional reactions. Its relocation two kilometers outside the center of the city had both spatial and ideological implications: it was an official attempt to displace its meanings toward a peripheral area of both Tallinn and Estonian culture as such—that is, to translate them into the context of contemporary European Estonia.

The final essay by Laurent Lamy tells the fascinating story of a translational movement whose center was Renaissance Florence. The paradigm shift from a geocentric to a heliocentric universe, he argues, was in part possible because of the combination of mystical and rational thought which emerged in the early Renaissance—largely through the translations of one Flavius Mithridates, born Guglielmo Raimondo Moncada (ca. 1445–1489), a colorful figure who was a Jewish convert to Christianity. From 1485 to 1487, he labored by the side of Pico della Mirandola, translating Kabbalistic literature. The collaboration between the two scholars was one of the most fertile translation ventures in the history of ideas in the West; it provided the European intellectual elite with a reservoir of ideas and symbolic patterns that found resonance in provinces of thought “located many leagues from their country of origin.” The introduction of Persian and Chaldean solar theologies, and the concept of a plurality of worlds presented through the various perspectives offered by cosmological speculations of the Jewish Kabbalah, had a large impact on the evolving ideas of the intellectual elite of the Quattrocento. The translation of a critical mass of Kabbalistic and Arabian astronomical treatises—the beginnings of which far exceeded the translations produced under the enlightened caliphate of Bagdad between the ninth and twelfth centuries—established, in a very short time span, a fertile interplay between sapiential traditions of ancient times and embryonic ideas of modern science. Florence was, for several decades, the epicenter of this heightened activity around translation, which opened up a fault line that shook the geocentric status quo.